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AUTHOR Johnson, Hope; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The expression of children's concepts of sex-roles was explored by examining changes in the masculinity and femininity of human figure drawings of males and females. A total of 106 sixth-grade students participated in two Draw-a-Person sessions. In the drawing task, persons to be drawn were either specified in terms of gender or unspecified as to gender but described as being either masculine or feminine. Thus, six descriptions were used: male/masculine, male/feminine, female/feminine, female/masculine, feminine sex-role/no gender specified, and masculine sex-role/no gender specified. It was hypothesized that (1) boys would respond to incongruity between traditional sex-role and gender with exaggeration of masculinity or femininity in their drawings; (2) girls would be more likely to assimilate the mixed configuration; and (3) when the sex of the stimulus person was not specified, subjects would assume congruity between sex-role and gender. Results of mixed factorial analysis of varience and a chi-square test show that, regardless of described sex-role of stimulus persons, gender of child and specified gender of stimulus persons had the most significant effect on the masculinity/femininity of the children's drawings. In the absence of gender specification, sex-role determined gender of figure drawn. Girls drew figures of both genders; boys drew male figures. (Author/RH)

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Sex-role Concepts and Gender Identity in Children's Drawings[1]

Hope Johnson, Agnes O'Connell, and Roland Siiter

Montclair State College

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Abstract

Regardless of described sex-role, gender of child and specified gender of stimulus had the most significant impact on masculinity/femininity of human figure drawings of sixth grade children. In the absence of gender specification sex-role determined gender of figure. Girls drew figures of both genders; boys drew male figures.

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Sex-role Concepts and Gender Identity in Children's Drawings

Hope Johnson, Agnes O'Connell, and Roland Siiter

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Purpose

A review of studies examining sex typing of children as evidenced in the willingness of boys and girls to take part in cross-sex-role behavior has revealed a tendency for boys to be more strongly sex-typed than girls (Ward, 1968; Pulaski, 1970; Wolf, 1973; Schau, Kahn, Diepold and Cherry, 1980; Payne, 1981). Studies on the perception of cross-sex-role behavior by children and adults indicate that the out-of-role behavior of a person influences the subject's perception of that person as masculine and feminine (Hensley and Borges, 1981; Cowan, 1979). Although human figure drawings were mainly used in the past to indicate gender identity, it has been found that drawings reveal children's values (Dennis, 1966) and projection of their concepts of masculinity and femininity or sex-role (Heinrich and Triebe, 1972). The present study employed the Draw-A-Person technique to explore children's perceptions of individuals described in same and cross-sex-role behavior conditions. Livesley and Bromley (1973) proposed that "the role prescriptions or 'stereotypes' associated with some features of appearance suggests to him (the child) how the other person is likely to behave"(p.21). Here it was assumed that the reverse would hold true--that certain sex-role behavior would elicit specific physical cues.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the expression of children's concepts of sex-roles by examining changes in the

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masculinity and femininity in human figure drawings of males and females described in same and cross-sex-role behavior conditions of boys and girls. There are three hypotheses implied from previous research: (a) boys will respond to incongruity between traditional sex-role and gender with exaggeration of masculinity or femininity in their drawings; (b) girls will be more likely to assimilate the cross-sex-role behavior--previous research notes the flexibility of the girls' sex-role identity (Rudy, 1968; Biller, Singer and Fullerton, 1969; Feinman and Rogers, 1974; Bem, 1975); and (c) when the sex of the person to be drawn is not specified subjects will assume that individuals described as feminine are females and persons described as masculine are males.

Subjects

Subjects were 106 sixth graders (53 males and 53 females) from three public elementary schools in West Orange, N.J. Subjects mean age was 11 years, 11 mos. with a range from 10 years, 4 mos. to 13 years, 3 mos.

Procedure

The following six conditions were used: male-masculine description, male-feminine description, female-feminine description, female-masculine description, feminine description-no sex specified and masculine description-no sex specified. Each subject participated in two Draw-A-Person sessions. The sex of the person described remained constant while the sex-role of the person varied. The children read a description of a "masculine" and "feminine" male or female. The feminine description was as follows:

> This girl(boy) is very quiet and likes to sit and read. She(He) enjoys jumping rope. She(He) often helps others and listens to what others have to say. When she(he) gets upset, she(he) cries and talks about how she(he) feels. She(He) likes to go with her(his) brother or sister to the store.

And the masculine description:

> This girl(boy) is very loud and likes to run and play. She(He) enjoys playing baseball. She(He) often works with others and talks to others about what activities need to be done that day. When she(he) gets upset, she(he) does not cry or talk to anyone about his/her feelings. She(He) likes to go alone to the store.

When sex of described person was not specified, subjects read only a masculine and feminine description of a "person". Criteria for establishing specific masculine (active) and feminine (passive) behaviors were found in Broverman (1972). For example, feminine behaviors included quietness, emotionality, and dependence whereas masculine behaviors included loudness, non-emotionality, and independence. Subjects were then asked to draw the person described. A scale for masculine/feminine appearance of figure drawn was developed ranging from very masculine to very feminine and based on masculine items such as broad shoulders, broad chest, and muscularity, and feminine items such as narrow shoulders, chest development and wide hips. The drawings were rated for overall masculinity/femininity by three judges. Verbal expressiveness, measured by summing the number of words accompanying the drawings was also examined.

Results

A 2x3x2 mixed factorial ANOVA was computed on the means listed in Table 1 to determine differences in masculinity/femininity ratings. Lower means represent more masculine ratings. Overall,

Table 1

Means for Masculinity-Femininity Ratings

Sex of Subject	Description	Sex of Protagonist: Male	Female	Neuter	Overall Means	Overall Means for Sex of Subject
Male	Masculine	9.70	13.90	10.92	11.36	11.34
	Feminine	7.90	15.00	11.21	11.32	
Female	Masculine	8.63	15.94	12.15	12.30	13.26
	Feminine	8.75	16.65	16.55	14.23	
	Overall Means	8.75	15.32	12.87	---	---

sex of subject was significant, $F(1,100) = 15.07$, $p<.001$. Boys tended to draw masculine figures and girls tended to draw feminine figures.

Sex of person described (protagonist) was also significant, $F(2,100) = 70.31$, $p<.001$. Overall, male protagonists were drawn as slightly masculine, female protagonists were drawn as slightly feminine, and when gender of the protagonist was not specified, the rating fell at the midpoint (neuter) designation on the scale. However, an interaction effect which was significant at the .01 level, $F(2,100)=5.48$, $p<.01$, of sex of subject and sex of protagonist revealed that females and males differed significantly when drawing the protagonist with no gender specification; boys drew a masculine figure whereas girls drew a feminine figure.

The within-subjects factor of description of protagonist was significant at the .05 level, $F(2,100) = 4.51$, $p<.05$. Overall, subjects tended to draw a more masculine figure under the masculine description and a more feminine figure under the feminine description.

There was a significant interaction of sex of protagonist and description at the .01 level, $F(2,100) = 5.55$, $p<.01$, which indicated that male protagonists were drawn as masculine when described as masculine or feminine and this tendency also held for female protagonists who were drawn as feminine when described as either masculine or feminine. However, when the protagonist's sex was not specified, masculinity and femininity ratings differed the most.

For subjects who received no gender identity of the person described, a chi square test was computed on the frequencies of male and female figures drawn and the following findings were significant at the .001 level $\chi^2(1) = 16.16$, $p < .001$. Significantly more male subjects drew male figures than female figures. Significantly more female subjects drew female figures than male figures, although females drew more male figures than males drew female figures--a finding which supports the contention of greater sex-role flexibility of girls.

The results of another chi square test to assess the effect of the masculine and feminine descriptions on the frequency of male and female figures drawn by all subjects were significant at the .01 level, $\chi^2(1) = 8.74$, $p < .01$. Subjects tended to draw more females in the feminine condition and males in the masculine condition than females in the masculine condition and males in the feminine condition. This finding supports the hypothesis that children would "match" gender and sex-role. However, more males were drawn in the feminine condition than females were drawn in the masculine condition. In general, males and females preferred to draw their own sex even when the sex-role of the protagonist varied.

Female subjects tended to express themselves verbally significantly more often during the task than did the males.

Conclusions

Results from the no sex specified condition support the hypothesis that children would assume that a person with a masculine description is a male whereas a person described as

feminine is female. The matching of sex-role with gender may be an expression of the children's sex-role expectations for males and females. The frequency of males drawn under the feminine description by boys was not expected, but may be an indication that boys would rather draw their own sex than draw a female figure even when the sex-role is feminine.

The results seem to indicate that the specific characteristics of the drawing of a male or female figure by a child were affected by sex-role concepts of the child. However, the drawings were influenced mainly by the gender identity of the child and the figure drawn. Both boys and girls tended to draw male protagonists as physically masculine and female protagonists as feminine in appearance. However, males drew a masculine figure and females drew a feminine figure when the gender of the protagonist was not specified; both boys and girls responded with their own gender identity when drawing the neuter protagonist.

The sex-role description of the protagonist influenced children's renditions of the figure darwn as masculine or feminine. Children appear to associate certain bodily characteristics with masculine and feminine sex-roles. Interestingly, the most masculine mean rating (7.90) was evident when boys drew males in the feminine sex-role description. It appears that the male can partake in out-of-role behavior as long as he appears masculine.

The interaction of gender of protagonist and sex-role description revealed a tendency for subjects to draw males and females as masculine and feminine respectively, regardless of the change

in sex-role description. It appears that physical appearance is associated more with the gender of the individual than with the individual's sex-role. It may be that the sex of the protagonist had such a strong influence on the determination of the physical aspects of the figure that boys and girls could not express differences in assimilation of or resistance to cross-sex-role behavior by way of physical characteristics.

Although the results indicate gender of subject is a strong factor in influencing the masculinity-femininity of a figure drawn by a child, sex-role of the figure also appears to be an important variable. Children are expressing not only biological or physical aspects of people when they draw but also the association of physical appearance with particular sex-role behavior.

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